

Introduction

Fiscal Years 2001-2005 Highlights

One of the most important charges a state agency faces is responsiveness to changing conditions and demands, while remaining true to its mission and preserving the stability that citizens expect of government. Since our last strategic plan was issued, the Texas Department of Health (TDH) has assessed the many forces that shape health status in our state. We have encountered internal and external factors challenging us to rethink TDH's role and improve how we do our work. We also have been reminded of our traditional duties and the ongoing expectations that the people of Texas and our public health partners hold for the agency.

This strategic plan presents the latest snapshot of ongoing negotiations, improved understanding, and internal decisions to work more effectively toward our overarching goal of improving the health of the state. This plan offers pragmatic steps toward sustainable change, not the revolution that some may have hoped.

At the core of the strategic plan lies a newly-articulated philosophy of TDH. After two years of work with internal and external stakeholders and partners, the Board of Health and TDH executive managers crafted new vision, mission, and philosophy statements (See Chapter 1). Our philosophy reflects what we value and puts forth the principles that guide TDH's public health activities:

- Support community-based solutions;
- Ensure that public health efforts lead to improved health outcomes;
- Make prevention the priority of public health efforts; and
- Carry out the state's leadership role.

Several strategic and operational issues emerge as highlights of TDH's strategic plan for fiscal years (FYs) 2001-2005. Each of these illustrates how TDH is putting its philosophy to work. In their own way, each represents a milestone in our ongoing process to build a better, more responsive, more effective Texas Department of Health.

Improve Health Outcomes

A central question driving Texas' public health activities is, "What is the purpose of public health?" The answer is to improve health outcomes. We assess this by measuring the impact of our public health activities. Attentiveness to outcomes makes one mindful of the effectiveness of public health actions. Among proposed changes to the agency's performance measures, in the health status measures that have been selected as performance benchmarks, and through efforts to develop valid and useful health indicators to assess the health of Texas and its communities, the department has begun to hold itself to a higher standard: can TDH produce measurable change in the health problems that Texas faces?

Enhance Health Information

As TDH works more with statewide partners and with communities to understand their health status, TDH must make sure that the vast amounts of health data obtained can be translated into usable, relevant health information. TDH must ensure that compelling stories behind the numbers are conveyed accurately and responsibly, in a way that informs and empowers decision makers. And, in the balance between increased accessibility and the personal nature of health data, TDH must ensure that information receives necessary protections for confidentiality and security.

The management of data at the Texas Department of Health is being primarily addressed through the Information Resources Steering Committee. Aligned with a charge of the agency's Sunset Bill (House Bill 2085 of the 76th Legislative Session), the Committee's charge is to establish information resource plans, policies and procedures for the collection, handling, storage, and dissemination of health data.

The Information Resources Strategic Plan in Appendix G provides a framework for data management. This framework includes data system policies, integration of databases, data accessibility to the public, and stakeholder input regarding access to agency data.

Essential Public Health Functions

A public health priority, supported by the passage of HB 1444 in the 76th Legislative session, is ensuring the presence of essential public health functions in Texas. The essential functions are public health activities that foster conditions necessary for people to be healthy. The incorporation of the essential functions helps streamline public health actions and maximize public health resources. These functions usually are directed toward populations rather than individuals. For example, when health departments investigate disease outbreaks, certify the safety of a food product, or inform communities about health risks, they are performing essential public health functions that serve the common good. Essential public health functions are the public health duties that are most likely to affect the life of any and all persons in Texas.

In meeting the charge of HB 2085, TDH is assessing the degree that the essential public health functions exist in local communities, and link with local public health systems to ensure the functions exist more completely statewide. Strategy E.2.4. on Coordinated Essential Public Health Services represent the department's first steps toward realigning its state funds in support of local public health systems (see Table 1).

Table 1. Ten Essential Public Health Functions

Essential Function 1: <i>Monitor the health status of individuals in the community to identify community health problems.</i>
Essential Function 2: <i>Diagnose and investigate community health problems and community health hazards.</i>
Essential Function 3: <i>Inform, educate, and empower the community with respect to health issues.</i>
Essential Function 4: <i>Mobilize community partnerships in identifying and solving community health problems.</i>
Essential Function 5: <i>Develop policies and plans that support individual and community efforts to improve health.</i>
Essential Function 6: <i>Enforce laws and rules that support individual and community efforts to improve health.</i>
Essential Function 7: <i>Link individuals who have a need for community and personal health services to appropriate community and private providers.</i>
Essential Function 8: <i>Ensure a competent workforce for the provision of essential public health services.</i>
Essential Function 9: <i>Research new insights and innovative solutions to community health problems.</i>
Essential Function 10: <i>Evaluate the effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services in a community.</i>

Source: Chapter 121, Health and Safety Code

Expanding Access to Quality Health Care

A majority of the state's public health resources are committed to maintaining a health care safety net to break the falls of individuals who need personal health care services ranging from routine preventive care to life saving treatment. Texas has constructed a variety of health care programs from state and federal funds for individuals who lack health insurance or who have special health care needs. The reality is that this safety net is tangled with different eligibility requirements and regulations, selective packages of services provided, and scattered state contracts to providers to deliver the care.

With an eye on simplifying access to services for individuals and maximizing the efficiency with which funds are administered, TDH has focused anew on how to coordinate its programs for health care. The Service Delivery Integration project, supported by the passage of HB 2085, is working to integrate the functions of different health care delivery programs as much as possible. Integration will include developing a plan for implementing a uniform contracting process and standard method of contract performance monitoring.

Advancing Public Health Region Priorities

TDH has made progress in taking our activities closer to the people we serve through enhancing the regional public health system. No longer just the state's gap-fillers and providers of last resort for areas without local level contractors and health departments, the eight Public Health Regional Offices, which cover eleven public health regions, are strengthening their role as the conveners for local public health systems. Part of that role is to assess and bring forward the priorities of the people in their parts of the state.

Across the eight public health regional offices there are four major public health priorities. Addressing these priorities is especially important in areas along the Texas-Mexico and Texas-Louisiana borders where needs for public health performance are critical (See Appendix I). Senate Bill 501 from the 76th Texas Legislature required state agencies to examine the needs of these two border regions.

The first is, "Strengthening and establishing local public health infrastructure." Strategies for accomplishing this priority include building partnerships with local health departments, building new local public health systems,

and partnering with community-based organizations desiring to serve diverse populations.

The second is, “Ensuring the presence of the essential public health functions across the regions.” We do this by managing TDH programs to achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency as well as establishing relationships with community leaders in order to help them identify communities’ public health needs and the ways they need to respond to them.

The third is, “Strengthening public health systems through training and education linkages.” These linkages include reaching out to graduate students in public health and the licensed health care professions in order to secure a future public health work force.

The fourth is, “Enhancing capacity to respond to bioterrorism and public health emergencies.” Multiple parties – urban and rural and public and private – must be prepared to detect and respond to potential terrorist attacks with chemical or biological agents. Rapid response to public health emergencies requires cooperation and networking, heightened rapid communication abilities, epidemiologic skills to detect and investigate potential outbreaks, disaster preparedness to respond when events are detected.

Coordination with Health and Human Services Agencies

Over the last two years, relationships have strengthened between TDH, the Health and Human Services Commission, and the 12 other agencies that make up the Texas health and human services (HHS) enterprise. The links that should occur to advance coordinated services for the people of the state have been tightened, not only in administrative, planning, and management areas, but also in programmatic areas.

Key among these links are the shared Health and Human Service Strategic Priorities (detailed in Appendix J). These priorities were collaboratively developed by the agencies in response to concerns identified by stakeholders in a series of 21 local forums conducted statewide by regional Councils of Government, local United Way chapters, and the state health and human service agencies.

TDH will lead in advancing three of the priorities:

- Enhance the conditions that support good health and self-sufficiency in south Texas colonias.
- Develop and implement a long-range interagency project on how to more effectively prevent delinquency and conduct disorders in children and adolescents.
- Respond to the growing number of persons with diabetes by increasing public and policy-maker awareness and making other appropriate policy changes.

TDH commits to working with HHS agencies on all of the other priorities to which TDH is linked (Appendix J).

Achieve Customer Service

TDH has developed a compact with Texans that reflects our commitment to excellence in customer service. We have three customer service goals centered around trust, responsiveness and continuous improvement, detailed in Appendix E.

Currently, TDH is focusing on the assessment of customer service needs for persons requesting information from the Bureau of Vital Statistics through a customer service survey. The Bureau of Vital Statistics has the largest customer service base among the agency's public health programs.

In addition, TDH is undertaking an inventory of its external customers to identify strategies for better meeting their service needs. Through a focus group process with stakeholders, TDH will come to better understand stakeholder needs, communication strategies and methods for evaluating the agency's stakeholder practices.

Individually and collectively, these seven highlights: health outcomes; health information, essential public health functions; health care safety net and service delivery integration; regional priorities; coordination with Health and Human Service agencies; and customer service, demonstrate the TDH's commitment to translating public health philosophy into practice. Many of these highlights will be analyzed and improvements plans proposed in the Comprehensive Strategic and Operational Plan that will be presented to the Texas Legislature during the 77th session. These

highlights summarize but do not eclipse the many programs and day-to-day activities and services that TDH continues to provide and that embody the agency's mission to enliven communities to improve, protect and promote their health. Strategies to improve public health practice will continue to be examined and defined in future TDH strategic planning cycles.

Chapter One of the TDH Strategic Plan 2001-2005 addresses statewide and agency strategic contexts. Chapter Two describes the scope and functions of TDH. Chapter Three introduces the external assessment. Chapter Four focuses on internal assessment. Chapter Five details performance benchmarking. Chapter Six presents TDH's strategic planning structure. Appendices A-K provide supporting information.

